

The world is 'still waiting for a women's revolution' - Zineb El Rhazoui

 By [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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Late last year, Saudi Arabian women were granted the right to obtain a driver's licence and to drive unaccompanied. Some would say this is a big step for the highly conservative nation. But for [Zineb El Rhazoui](#), being granted the right to drive in 2017 is not a revolution, and only shows the very slow rate of change in attaining gender equality.



[Zineb El Rhazoui](#) is a Moroccan-born French human rights activist and a former columnist for the satirical weekly magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.

"Cars were invented years ago, but women in Saudi Arabia can only drive now?! That is not progress, that is testimony that we are still waiting for a women's revolution and that there is still a lot to do."

Moroccan-born EL Rhazoui lives in France where she has 24/7 protection because of her work as a human rights activist. She is also a former columnist for satirical weekly magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and co-authored the comic book *The Life of Mohamed* with its slain editor Stéphane Charbonnier.

Freedom and dignity

At the core of her struggle as an activist sits freedom and dignity. "If I was born a man, things would be different. But I was born a Muslim woman in a Muslim country that is a religious state, with religious laws. It is a country where men and women are deeply unequal."

She is one of several human rights activists that spoke about women's rights in particular at the recent [Oslo Freedom Forum](#) (OFF) in Johannesburg.

What made her take a stand? "I had no choice. As a woman I could keep silent, and fit the mould and serve a man, accepting that I am inferior to men. But I am not inferior to anyone, and everyone deserves the same rights. It is my duty to speak up for those who cannot. If I give up and disappear, then they have won. I am still here and continue to remind them that they are criminals. They will not win the battle in the long run."

She is lucky that she is given protection by the French government. "It is not about protecting me but protecting my rights to keep saying what I think. I have a duty to my fellow journalists who live in other countries with no protection to keep doing this."

While she says it is difficult to live in a moving jail, she is still more free than those who want to kill her. "Protection is not the problem, the problem is a far more complex one."

“ Powerful reminder of what's at stake with [@ZinebElRhazoui](#) talking about Charlie Hebdo attack. [@MediaMattersZA](#) [@OsloFF](#) [@NelsonMandela](#) [pic.twitter.com/X5jbVY2r0g](#)— William Bird (@Billbobbird) [March 27, 2018](#) ”

Women's rights are not just Western values

"The worst racism is cultural. By that I mean that some cultures do not enjoy the same rights as other cultures. Equality and freedom are not the West's values, they are values for all. There cannot be women's rights in the West and different women's rights in Islamic countries. All women should be free to do what they want, marry who they want, work or not - to have a choice and a voice. Stating the women's rights are Western values is a racist statement and deprives a whole part of the world of universal rights."

In her campaigning and published works, she has called for an end to what she describes as "Islamic fascism" and says no religion is one of "peace and love". "Religions are all quite the same. Legends and superstitions written centuries ago are not constitutions that should rule our lives today. Religions of centuries ago should have remained in their place if they cannot make us someone better. Blindly applying religion is dangerous."

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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